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BIBLE LEPROSY.

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Since the death of Father Damien our attention has been called over and over again to the awful disease to which in the prime of life he fell a victim. In magazines, the question of its contagiousness has been argued with much learning and with not a little warmth. Many Bible students imagined in reading these articles that they were adding to their knowledge of the Bible, at least of an important Bible disease. Perhaps they were. But one thing which I hope to make clear before I am done is that the Leprosy about which so much has been said is quite a different thing from the disease known by that name in the English Bible, Old Testament and New Testament. But if the two things are quite distinct, why is it that they have one name? Before answering this question of the name, let us try to find out whether the diseases are or are not the same. The simplest way will be to look at the modern disease, so-called "True Leprosy;" then to look at the Bible account of what is there in our English version called "Leprosy." It will be seen that the two things are very different.

As to the modern disease, I will follow the account which Dr. Erasmus Wilson gives in Dr. Quain's Medical Dictionary. Dr. Wilson has written a much fuller account in his book on "Diseases of the skin;" this I have not seen; and there is for our purposes a sufficiently full description in the article referred to.

In all forms of modern Leprosy the parts most immediately affected are the integument (skin and membranes) and nervous system. There are sores outside on the surface of the body, but there are also tubercles formed inside. The liver, kidneys, and alimentary canal are attacked; general waste

sets in, which stops only with death. This disease is not merely on the outside, it is organic: awful smells are given out, and sleep is next to impossible.

The disease develops in three special directions—more or less in all three, but, as a rule, more in some one than the others. Drs. Daneelsson and Boeck have written largely on the disease as they have watched it in Norway: they hold that there are only two quite independent kinds (1) Tubercular (2) Anaesthetic.*

The three varieties named by Dr. Erasmus Wilson are as follows:—

1. THE TUBERCULAR KIND, *elephantiasis tuberosa*. In this, red spots cover the body so closely on the face as to give a general redness. These spots are followed by tubercles or pimples which break, after which others are formed. The nasal bones fall in, the eyes are destroyed. There is a swelling of different parts of the body, hands, feet, etc.: then the members get deformed and the voice becomes hoarse.

2. There is the ANÆSTHETIC KIND, *elephantiasis anæsthetica*. In this there are spots and blotches but no tubercles or ulcers. The prevailing character of this is that the system becomes insensitive. You can apply fire or any sharp instrument to the skin, but there is no feeling at all. Yet the internal pains are almost always indescribably keen.

3. The MUTILATING KIND, *elephantiasis nodosa* or *mutilam*. This is more local than the others; its main feature is the loss of the limbs. The fingers and toes, the hands and feet fall entirely away.

Though these three are noticed as if they were quite distinct yet they are found together, in the same districts, and not seldom in the same individuals.

This leprosy has been described by travelers in language strong and hard to read; yet from what I saw in Egypt and in Palestine I consider no words too strong in which to set forth its awfulness. I have seen with infinite pain the open sores, the deformities of face and hands. I have seen the poor creatures going about with several of their limbs altogether gone. I have heard their deep-throated, harsh cry for

* See Keil's Biblical Archæology; 114-16.

help. I have given myself the joy of dropping coins into their out-stretched hands.

This is the leprosy about which so much ado has been made of late; from this Father Damien died. Edward Clifford, the sympathetic biographer of Damien, visited the Sandwich Islands; he describes the faces of the poor lepers as "swelled and drawn and distorted, with bloodshot goggle eyes." He says Father Damien used to smoke in order to deaden the loathsome smell coming from the lepers. In March 1888 Mr. Clifford visited the leper asylum at Agra, India. The faces of the inmates were too dreadful to look upon: those lepers were lame, maimed, and mutilated. They sang lustily under the leadership of an American Baptist missionary, Mr. Jones.* This leprosy prevails largely in our Indian empire; in Palestine and Egypt; in the West Indies; and nearest of all to us, in Norway. In the middle ages it was common in this country, so common that there were in England alone 250 leper hospitals. In Waterford at the present moment, a friend tells me, there is a building marked "Leper House." In a church at Ripon there is a door, now fastened, with the words "Lepers' door" still printed on it. The room into which this door leads was at one time a chapel used exclusively by lepers.

Some have held that Leprosy was introduced into Europe by the Crusaders from Palestine. This is against the voice of history, for in the eighth century there were many leper hospitals in the Frankish kingdom: there were hospitals in Ireland in the ninth century, and in England long before William the Conqueror won Hastings.

This disease was known among the Greeks as *elephantiasis* because it makes the skin rough like that of an elephant. What we now commonly understand by *elephantiasis* is the "Barbadoes leg" or swelling of the lower portion of the body. The other is now called *Elephantiasis graecorum*, or more generally, "True Leprosy."

The common view is that *True Leprosy* is not contagious;

*This must be my friend and fellow student Rev. Daniel Jones, a Welshman not a Yankee. And in our College days Mr. Jones was quite clever at the musical art.

most of the authorities support this view. In the year 1867 the Royal College of Physicians took this matter under special consideration. Evidence was got from every spot affected, and they came to an almost unanimous decision that leprosy is not contagious. Since then, men of the greatest eminence have taken the opposite view. Only in December last Dr. Morell Mackenzie in the "Nineteenth Century" and Dr. Robson Roose in the "Fortnightly Review" argued very strongly for the contagiousness of "True Leprosy." Those who deny this explain the case of Father Damien by inoculation, some of the leprous matter somehow finding its way into the blood. I have seen this explanation in the *Lancet*.

Now I wish you to consider the *Leprosy about which we read in the Bible*. Nowhere is it anything like so fully described in the Bible as in Leviticus 13. Let us attend to this account. Moses, or the author of this part of the Bible, is aiding the people to know the true leper, in order that he may be kept apart. What are the signs? First, we are informed how to know leprosy from spots appearing on the skin. If there is a rising, or a scab, or a white spot, leprosy is present, providing that the plague reaches below the skin, and the hair growing on the part turns white.*

If proud flesh shows itself without previous spots, etc., and if the hair on the part swollen with raw flesh turns white, that is Leprosy, chronic Leprosy, and the person so affected is unclean, and must live outside the camp.†

When a man is wholly covered with white spots, he is declared clean. His being so covered shows that he does not suffer from the serious kind, though this too is called "Leprosy." It answers to what we call "White Leprosy."‡

The care of a man who has a sore following a boil§ or a burn|| is next examined. If the sore goes lower down than the skin, and if the hair growing on it becomes white, this makes the man unclean.

Then we have to do with the head and the face as covered

* 13: 1-8.

§ vs. 18-23.

† vs. 9-11.

|| vs. 24-28.

‡ vs. 12-13.

by hair and beard. If an eruption breaks out on the head or under the beard the man has real leprosy, provided that the sore is lower than the skin, and that the hair turns yellow.

In vs. 38 and 39 a sort of Leprosy is described which is quite harmless: it is known by its having a pale, white complexion and is called *bohaq*. This disease is to this day well known among the Arabs, and, singular to say, they call it by the very same name *bohaq*.

Now, it will appear to anyone who compares so-called "True Leprosy" with the disease spoken of in Leviticus, that we have to do with kinds of diseases altogether different, though in all alike the skin is affected, and all are loathsome. In Leviticus there is not the faintest suggestion of deformity of limb, or of loss of limbs: we are told of sores breaking out—nothing more. It is wonderful that diseases so different in their causes, operation and result, could have been identified. It makes one think of the words of an eminent Italian physician, "L'opinione era contagiosa, e non la malatha" (Brunelli). It has been said that the symptoms named in Leviticus relate to the early history of Leprosy, so that we should not expect to find the more serious developments of Greek *elephantiasis* referred to. But Sir Resdon Bennet, M. D., LL. D., F. R. S., ex-president of the Royal College of Surgeons, holds that the appearances of the Levitical disease are quite unlike the early showings of "True Leprosy." He quotes from medieval writers who have given directions for discovering the approach of Greek *elephantiasis*, and he proves to demonstration that the Leprosy which they diagnose is altogether different from Bible Leprosy.*

If we carefully consult other allusions to Leprosy in the Bible, we shall see no reason for changing our opinion. The first Bible mention of it is in Exodus 4: 6, where Moses was to prove his Divine mission by putting his hand into his bosom. After taking it out, his hand became "leprous as snow." There is no difficulty here. In the leprosy of Miriam, Numbers 12: 10-16, we seem to come upon a case looking like modern Leprosy. Miriam became "lep-

*See Diseases of the Bible, pp. 32-33.

rous, white as snow." This account agrees with all I have said. But Aaron pleads on her behalf to their brother Moses in these words: "Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb." This is practically the rendering of the Revised Version, though the two great versions the LXX and the Vulgate give a different form to the words and seem based on a different text. What do the above words mean? That the leprosy of Miriam made her as one half eaten up with disease, one with the foundation of life sapped? This I verily believe. But like such a person in what? in being diseased? I think confidently not, but in being shut out of ordinary society. So explained, the words present no difficulty to me. We read of Naaman and Gehazi in 2 Kings 5. Of Naaman we are told only that he was "a leper"—no more. Of Gehazi more is said, though no more than we learn from the cases of Moses and Miriam; he was "a leper, as white as snow." But neither of these persons could have had an attack of what we now call "Leprosy," for Naaman still discharged his duties as General of the army of Syria, and he moved in the royal circle; while Gehazi acted as servant to Elisha and conversed with the king of Israel after his infliction.

The leprosy of Uzziah (2 Chron. 26: 19-21) and of the four who lingered before the gate of the city of Samaria (2 Kings 8: 3-11) has nothing special—indeed, no description is given at all. After closely looking into all the allusions to Leprosy in the New Testament, I see no reason at all to change my position, indeed, the position is made stronger, as the Greek word *lepra* has a more definite meaning than the Old Testament word *tsarangath*. New Testament Leprosy shut its victim out of society, except in one instance, "Simon the Leper," and perhaps he received the name because at one time he had been a leper, but was now recovered. If he were still a leper, his disease must have been of the clean type. Of Christ, the great Healer, we are told that he touched the leper, and "straightway the leprosy departed from him, and he was made clean." Mark 2: 41-42.

What, in modern speech, are we to understand by Bible

Leprosy? Nothing is more clear than that there are many kinds of Leprosy referred to in the Bible, but all of them are diseases of the skin more or less serious, none of them being particularly perilous to life. The word now in common use among medical men for the *lepra* of the Greeks is *Psoriasis*, a word which Dr. Wilson would confine to eczema, corresponding to its Greek original *Psora*; but which, as a fact, covers all that in the Bible is known as Leprosy. Sir Resdon Bennett is very pronounced in what he says—and *his* words have much weight:

“It may, however, without fear of contradiction be affirmed that scarcely any physician of the present day, can see in the various features of the Levitical disease any but varieties of cutaneous disease of some kind.”* An additional proof of the conclusion at which we have arrived is that in the LXX the Greek word *lepra* translates the Hebrew word for Leprosy, *Tsarangath*.† Now this word *lepra* has a very clear and well defined meaning in the writings of the Greek physicians from the time of Hippocrates, who flourished four and one-half centuries before the time of Christ, until medical science passed away from the Greeks. We are quite sure that those who made and favored the Septuagint version regarded the Hebrew *Tsarangath* as a mere disease of the skin. This goes for a good deal. Then the physician Luke employs the same word *lepra*, and he could not but know what the word meant at his day, and indeed long before and after. Josephus too uses this word, and though he was not like Luke a physician, he had a fair knowledge of the meaning of common Greek words. If the LXX translators, Luke and his fellow evangelists, and Josephus had wished to speak of what to-day goes by the name of Leprosy, they would have used the word *Elephantiasis*, which had this meaning, and to a Greek scholar no other.

Remember again that skin diseases like *Psoriasis* are common in Egypt and Palestine at the present day, while among

* Diseases of the Bible. p. 38.

† I represent the third Hebrew consonant by ng, not because this is its pronunciation, but to show that a consonant is meant, and I know of no more correct way of setting forth this letter, which has two sounds, as the Arabic shows.

the Jews of Egypt, Syria, India, etc., *Elephantiasis* is very rare. In Tangiers, both kinds of Leprosy, biblical and modern, abound, but Jews though common victims of what we argue to be Bible Leprosy, are almost wholly free from modern Leprosy. Is it not also significant that while Greek *Elephantiasis* or modern Leprosy is hereditary if not contagious, Jews in England are entirely free from the slightest taint of it? If this were the disease of their forefathers, it would be natural for them to show at least some traces of it.

In Arabic as in Greek there are two distinct words for Bible Leprosy and modern Leprosy; the former is called *Baratz*; the latter, modern Leprosy, is called *Judham*, which means "maimed" from *Jadham*, to maim. It is a pity we have the word "Leprosy" in the Bible in a sense altogether alien from the one it has in common speech or in the dictionaries. The Bible has the best right to the word as the latter is from a Greek word *Lepra*, which has the same meaning. Yet it is extremely awkward having a Bible meaning for Leprosy, and another—the commoner by far—altogether different.

Dr. Erasmus Wilson thinks we ought to follow the Greeks by keeping the word "Leprosy" for the Bible disease and *Elephantiasis** for modern Leprosy, *Psoriasis* then standing for what the Greek physicians meant by it. Can we not somehow bring this about? The Welsh language is as unfortunate as the English, for "Gwahanglwyt" (separating disease) stands for the two kinds of diseases, as the English word "Leprosy." As far as I am aware, German is no better off, "*Aufsatz*" covering the same ground as the English word: and there is the same confusion in most modern tongues—even in Hindustanee, as Rev. James Hewlett, M. A., Benares, informs me.

How and when did this confusion arise? Most recent authorities agree in making the Arab physicians responsible for the mistake. These were at their height in the tenth century when Rhazes and Haly Abbas flourished. They occupied

*What is now commonly dubbed "Elephantiasis" received this name through a careless mistake of the Arab physicians, and it has no right to the name at all.

themselves almost wholly in rendering into the Arabic speech the works of Hippocrates and Galen, just as the Arab philosophers of the same period translated the writings of Plato and Aristotle. The Greek word "Elephantiasis" which meant what "Leprosy" now means, they rendered by an Arabic word meaning "Bible Leprosy." This was the beginning of the confusion. When the era of the Crusades came round, Europeans were shocked by the the cases of Leprosy they saw in the East. As they gazed at the victims compelled to live apart; and as they surveyed the awful spectacles of misery, they thought at once they saw the "Leprosy" of the Bible. In the vernacular Arabic, long before established in the Holy Land, they found this awful disease spoken of in terms that strictly meant Bible Leprosy. The number of Crusaders was very great and they went out from every country of Europe; their influence is sufficient to account for the mistake which soon became almost universal, and which even now is so widespread that nine out of ten who read in the papers about Father Damien and Lepers' Homes have no suspicion but that they are reading of the disease called "Leprosy" in the Bible.

Old Matthew Poole, the delight of Bible scholars even at this time of day, in his wonderful "Synopsis" (mine is the London, best edition of 1669) points out the distinction between the two kinds of Leprosy. See also his "Annotations" where he more clearly decides for the view taken in this paper. Without naming intervening commentators who nearly all go wrong on this question, just think of an expounder so recent, so scholarly and so commendable as Adam Clark explaining the disease of Leviticus by quoting the orthodox passage from old "Maundrell's Travels." Good old Dr. Gill sees in *Tsarangath* nothing but a Divine infliction different from ordinary diseases, and only Divinely remediable. He is followed by Scott and others. They rest their conclusion on the root of *Tsarangath*—*tsarang*, which is held to mean "strike." But even accepting this root meaning* which

*The meaning "strike" is got from the Arabic; but another Semitic language—the Ethiopic—has the meaning "to make cease," from the same three letters.

is at least doubtful, the inference is unwarranted, as is proved by our word "stroke."

I cannot close this paper without calling attention to the question of "Contagion" and "Heredity."

Bible Leprosy is not contagious if we have properly explained it. There is no instance in Scripture of the disease being caught by contact with another. The common belief that Bible Leprosy is contagious arises from making "unclean" equivalent to "contagious." But that they have different meanings is proved by the fact that every dead body was "unclean," healthy animals and things without life were "unclean." Dr. Erasmus Wilson guided by the Bible account, Dr. Greenhill (quoted by Sir Resdon Bennett) and Sir Resdon Bennett, affirm that Scriptural leprosy is not contagious, and their view seems, out of question, correct.* Why then were lepers to be kept apart?

There are many skin diseases neither dangerous nor contagious which yet are unpleasant, and separation adds to the comfort of persons not so suffering. Many such diseases are caused by the want of cleanliness; and if thus applied to Bible Leprosy of the "unclean" kind it was well to punish the victims in order to make them and others avoid uncleanly habits.

Moreover priests mingled with lepers, and I have already called attention to the freedom with which Naaman and Gehazi moved about in society. When, after the captivity, synagogues were built wherever Jews resided, lepers were not prevented from attending with others,† nor were they excluded from early Christian assemblies.

Is Bible Leprosy hereditary? There is nothing in the Bible to show that it is, nor is there in the subsequent history of the Jews to show that this Leprosy is. And indeed it seems evident that the disease *Tsarangath* as spoken of in the Bible, is neither contagious nor hereditary. Sin is nowhere in the Bible compared to "leprosy," but some of the earliest Chris-

* It is but fair to say that according to Dr. Wilson *Tsarangath* may include some kinds of skin diseases that were contagious, such as the itch in which Eiphyta can be conveyed from one body to another.

† Lightfoot's works, Pitman's edition. Vol. XII. p. 172.

tian writers such as Gregory Nazianus, Tertullian, Origen and Augustine the Bishop make frequent reference to this disease as a type of sin. In many modern sermons, references are made which apply to modern leprosy only, and it is to be feared that many of us have "stock" sermons which require altering in this direction. But we would better be correct, however many popular sermons we spoil.